UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FIFTY-FIRST SESSION

Official Records

SECOND COMMITTEE
12th meeting
held on
Tuesday, 22 October 1996
at 4 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 12th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HAMBURGER (Netherlands)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 97 : ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

(a) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

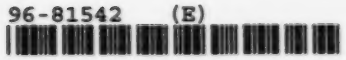
(b) SPECIAL SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of the publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-794, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.2/51/SR.12
27 August 1997
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

96-81542 (E)



The meeting was called to order at 4.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97 : ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (A/51/3 (Part II), A/51/87, A/51/131, A/51/208-S/1996/543, A/51/210, A/51/211-S/1996/551, A/51/295, A/51/357, A/51/462-S/1996/831 and A/51/375)

(a) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (A/51/3 (Part II), A/51/76 and Add.1 and A/51/510)

(b) SPECIAL SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21 (A/51/240)

1. Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the preparations for the special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 (A/51/420), said that the report offered a fairly detailed description of the preparatory process, which was as comprehensive as that for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and even more so in that it covered the range and amount of contributions received.

2. In that regard, and in response to the doubts raised at an informal meeting by the delegation of Cuba, he noted that the special session would receive contributions from the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Conferences of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), so that at the special session the General Assembly could have a genuinely comprehensive view of the results of the process begun at Rio and would not need to confine itself to activities undertaken by the Commission on Sustainable Development in connection with Agenda 21. Consequently, there was a potential difficulty, not of a lack of material, but, rather, of how to tackle the large amount of material that would be available for the review process. In connection with the Trust Fund established to enable developing countries to participate in the preparatory process sand in the review, he noted that contributions were inadequate and urged all those countries which had supported the preparatory process for the Rio Conference to contribute to the Trust Fund with the same generosity.

3. The Second Committee, for its part, must concern itself with various issues relating to the special session. Firstly, it must determine the dates when it was to be held. The Secretariat had proposed the week of 9 to 13 June, but elsewhere it had also been suggested that it should be held in the week of 23 to 27 June. The Secretariat had not difficulty with the special session being held at either time. Another question to be considered by the Second Committee was how the 1997 review was to be structured. As indicated in paragraph 46 of the report, while it was intended that the negotiating work should be done during the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, it was possible that outstanding issues would remain, given which it had been proposed to

establish an ad hoc committee of the whole, reporting to the plenary, which would hold meetings in parallel with the plenary meetings of the Assembly where a high-level debate would take place, which would facilitate attainment of agreement on outstanding matters.

4. With regard to the participation of non-governmental organizations, which had accounted for much of the dynamism of the Rio process, there were various possibilities. One was to apply the rules governing participation by such organizations in international conferences, whereas another would be to alternate formal meetings of the plenary with informal meetings at which non-governmental organizations would be allowed to participate. There were no established rules in that regard, since the 1997 review would be the first of its kind, as the Rio Conference had also been. In addition, the Secretariat was taking active steps to secure the participation of the private sector, so that the review could also cover its activities over the past five years. Media interest was also very important, and, in that regard, the Secretariat was collaborating closely with the Department of Public Information to promote interest, so that the review process would receive the broadest possible coverage.

5. A further issue, undoubtedly the most important, to be considered by the Second Committee, was the objective it hoped to attain during the 1997 review. Long before the holding of the Rio Conference, there had already been a fairly well-developed idea of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, which had already had a fairly well-defined structure. The Second Committee might focus its attention on that aspect and provide guidance in that regard to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session, as well as to the Commission's Ad Hoc Inter-Sessional Working Group. The Second Committee should not take any final decisions; that was the responsibility of the preparatory process itself, which would take place during the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, in accordance with the decision adopted by the General Assembly. Nevertheless the Second Committee could provide guidance as to possible outcomes of the review, which might consist of a series of commitments, a declaration including such commitments or a set of agreed conclusions.

6. Lastly, the Secretariat was aware of the great quantity of documents to be prepared and was attempting to organize them so that it would be possible to assimilate all the information that would be provided, as well as to complete all documentation by January, so as to enable delegations to study adequately all the documents before the preparatory process was conducted.

7. Mr. DIALLO (Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development), speaking as the Executive Secretary of the Interim Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, introduced documents A/51/76 and Add.1, containing the Secretary-General's reports on the eighth and ninth sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, and document A/51/510, containing the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/112 on the elaboration of the Convention.

8. As far as the activities of the Interim Secretariat were concerned, a number of significant measures had been adopted at various levels, in the past few months. The activities aimed at making the objectives of the Convention better known before action programmes were elaborated at the national, subregional and regional levels, and those designed to promote the process of formulating national, subregional and regional programmes of action in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean were particularly important. To prepare for the entry into force of the Convention, those regions should start in the near future, the process of overall assessment regarding the efforts made at various levels.

9. Non-governmental organizations had been granted a special role in the implementation of the Convention. Thus far, 363 non-governmental organizations had been accredited to the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee. The participation of such organizations was considered crucial to a successful implementation of the Convention.

10. The Interim Secretariat had also carried out very important activities in the area of public information in order to meet an increasing demand for information on the Convention. In that regard, the Secretariat had launched the first issue of the Convention Newsletter in English and French. The Newsletter would continue to be published on a regular basis, and other activities would be continued with a view to raising public awareness of the problem of desertification and promoting a better understanding of the Convention and its implementation. To that end, the Secretariat had participated with the Department of Public Information in producing a special Cable News Network (CNN) documentary which had been aired on the occasion of the World Day to Combat Desertification.

11. With respect to the negotiating process under the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, on 27 September, the Government of Chad had deposited with the United Nations the Fiftieth instrument of ratification or accession to the Convention, thus attaining the number required for its entry into force, which would take place on 26 December 1996. Thus far, 53 instruments of ratification or accession had been received. At its ninth session, in New York in September, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee had accepted the offers of the Government of Italy to host the first session of the Conference of the Parties in Rome, at a date to be determined late in 1997 and of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to provide support services.

12. At the eighth and ninth sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, satisfactory progress had been made. There was already almost complete agreement on the rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties, financial rules and arrangements for reviewing implementation of the Convention, as well as on the mandate of its Committee on Science and Technology, and the roster of experts and ad hoc panels associated with that Committee.

13. Under the present circumstances, it could only be hoped that ratification and accession would be speeded up, and that when the first session of the Conference of the parties was held in Rome within approximately a year, it would have before it an instrument endorsed by all affected countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the northern Mediterranean and other countries of Europe, as well

as by all their development partners, so that the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification would rapidly become a reality.

14. Ms. CHAVES (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the huge responsibilities that Agenda 21 had imposed on the developing countries had gained wide acceptance in the light of the assurances of full support and cooperation given by the developed country partners. In that context, the Group of 77 and China had attached the utmost importance to the activities of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and had committed themselves to the full implementation of Agenda 21.

15. The Group of 77 and China had planned to reduce air and water pollution, protect the land and marine ecosystem, and prevent land degradation. They had been assured that those countries that benefited the most from activities which destroyed the environment and endangered the earth because of their unsustainable consumption and production patterns, would implement measures designed to fulfil their part of the responsibilities. However, the eagerness of developing countries to protect the environment had been hampered by the lack of sufficient financial resources. That situation called into question the understanding that had been reached at the Rio Conference that the developmental and environmental objectives of Agenda 21 would require a substantial flow of new and additional financial resources to developing countries in order to cover the incremental costs of the actions that they would have to undertake to deal with environmental problems and accelerate sustainable development. Moreover, the commitment to transfer environmentally sound technologies on concessional and preferential terms in order to accelerate and achieve that development was yet to be fulfilled. Most of the developing countries simply could not afford those technologies.

16. The Group of 77 and China found it unacceptable that, while the Rio commitments with respect to financial resources, transfer of technology, improvement of market access for export products, obtaining more equitable terms of trade and making trade and environment mutually supportive were yet to be met, the developing countries were already being subjected to restrictive trade and investment policies that were allegedly necessary for the protection of the environment. The challenge facing the Commission on Sustainable Development was how to implement the pledges and commitments that heads of State and Government had made in Rio. The Commission not only must operate as a technical intergovernmental monitoring body with respect to the implementation of Agenda 21, but should also serve as a consensus mobilizer, and foster progress towards the promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development.

17. With regard to the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/51/420, the Secretariat must submit, as soon as possible, a draft to be used by the Commission on Sustainable Development as a basis for negotiations on the final document of the special session of the General Assembly, with the understanding that the full participation of Member States from the very beginning of the process of elaboration and negotiation of such draft would be ensured. The report also included the proposal by a number of countries that the Commission should promote the inclusion of conclusions from major international conferences as part of the General Assembly's review in 1997 of Agenda 21. The extent to which such conclusions could be included needed to be further clarified. At the same time, Agenda 21 should also be adapted to the

conclusions of other conferences so that such inclusion would be reciprocal. during the 1997 review of Agenda 21, a frank and analytical appraisal of the progress made and problems encountered in the implementation of Agenda 21 should be undertaken and strategies for future action should be formulated.

18. Her delegation support of the Bureau's view that the need for effective arrangements to allow major groups to contribute to the preparations for and deliberations during the special session of the General Assembly should be underscored, while fully safeguarding the General Assembly's role in relation to the rules of procedure and to specific decisions on the participation of those major groups in the 1997 special session. She also called for the full and effective participation of developing countries, in particular the least developed among them, in the special session and its preparatory process. In that regard, it was necessary and useful to have a detailed assessment of the situation of contributions to the Trust Fund to support the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, established to help those countries to participate. There was a need for a strong political will to find a new definition of development, a new attitude towards achieving it and a new commitment to sustain it.

19. Mr. MURPHY (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated States of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, as well as Iceland, stressed the very high priority which the European Union accorded to the special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of Agenda 21, which would be the most important event in the area of international cooperation for sustainable development since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro. The special session should also give political impetus and guidelines in the field of environment and sustainable development. Moreover, the European Union firmly believed that the contribution of the major groups involved in sustainable development, which had been recognized in General Assembly resolution 50/113 and decision 4/9 of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), remained a vital element, particularly in the preparatory phase of the special session. The European Union invited the active participation of such groups at all stages in the process.

20. In section III of his report on the special session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General had set out some organizational considerations, relating to the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, with which the European Union was in broad agreement. The European Union believed that all procedural resolutions should fully take into consideration the decisions adopted in 1995. As to the outcome of the special session, no attempt should be made to renegotiate Agenda 21. The main thrust of the review should be to assess the extent to which matters agreed at the Rio Conference had been implemented and to make suggestions for improvement where necessary. In addition, not only were the concerns of 1992 still valid, but new ones had also emerged. The results of the Secretariat's preliminary evaluations should help countries take positions on each of those issues. It was also important that the current General Assembly session did not prejudge them in any ways. The European Union expected that the special session would also agree on a declaration giving a vital political impetus to the next stage of the Rio process, and it therefore recalled the decision contained in General Assembly

resolution 50/113 calling for the highest possible level of participation in the special session, in order to ensure its success.

21. Mr. AZAIEZ (Tunisia) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the delegation of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. With regard to the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of UNCED and of the provisions of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, he noted the need to establish a global mechanism to mobilize and channel adequate and reliable financial resources at all levels, in the form of donations or, in their absence, in the form of soft loans. It was important to stress that such a financial mechanism depended for its success on the transfer to, adaptation by and development on the part of developing countries of ecologically sound, economically feasible and socially acceptable technologies. Questions of financing and technology transfer constituted the cornerstone of the implementation of the Convention to combat desertification.

22. Regarding the convening of a special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, he said that such a session should not give rise to a renegotiation of Agenda 21 or of other intergovernmental agreements related to sustainable development, but rather should stress the effective follow-up of the commitments made by Governments at the Rio Conference. The session should renew the collective commitment to global sustainable development. In order to analyse the successes and failures of that endeavour, the first priority was to undertake a review of cooperation and, above all, of financial assistance. Moreover, the special session should allow for the strengthening of United Nations mechanisms for better integrating environmental questions with the decision-making process. The United Nations specialized agencies could make a useful contribution to that effort by taking fuller account of the various aspects of sustainable development in their activities.

23. The relevant Tunisian national programme in the area of sustainable development was based on combating desertification, conserving water resources and balancing energy use with environmental protection. First, in its 30 year struggle against desertification, tunisia had taken the human dimension of the problem into consideration, assigning due weight to socio-economic factors in its analysis and search for solutions, and had improved its understanding of erosion and desertification as well as of socially acceptable and economically feasible ways to combat them. The complexity of the desertification problem in Tunisia was such that attempts to halt the progress of that scourge had been unsuccessful so far. Without the coordinated efforts of all, no country could bring the phenomenon under control; hence the importance of fulfilling the multilateral and international commitments undertaken under the Convention to combat desertification.

24. With regard to the second aspect of the Tunisian sustainable development strategy, in view of the close connection between water and economic and social development, Tunisia had for the past 25 years given priority to the enhancement of water resources, in the knowledge that tourism, the manufacturing industry and agriculture were competing for large quantities of safe water. The third element of the national sustainable development policy was the rational use of energy resources and the use of new and renewable sources of energy to ensure a

healthy and viable environment. To that end, Tunisia had implemented a three-pronged programme that focused on rationalizing energy consumption, modifying the consumption structure according to energy type and promoting the use of renewable sources of energy. The various commitments undertaken by Tunisia in those areas should result in considerable energy savings and in reducing the emission of greenhouse gases.

25. Finally, he noted that the implementation of Agenda 21 was advancing slowly. The review and appraisal of that implementation, which were to be carried out during the special session of the General Assembly in June 1997, would provide an opportunity for all countries, particularly those better able to contribute to the implementation of the programme, to take the necessary steps to ensure its full realization and to satisfy the expectations of the international community.

26. Mr. LOZANO (Mexico) said, regarding the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, that the General Assembly must give guidelines for the most effective use of the input from the various bodies mentioned in General Assembly resolution 50/113. Mexico had formulated the following suggestion concerning the special session.

27. First, with regard to organizational matters, high-level attendance at the special session, and broad participation by all sectors should be ensured. It would be an opportunity for an evaluation of both substantive and institutional aspects. With regard to substantive aspects, the implementation of the agreements reached in Rio should be evaluated, and areas where the desired progress had not been achieved should be pointed out. The reasons for delays, along with corrective measures to be taken, should be determined. From an institutional point of view, two issues should be addressed. On one level, the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development should be reviewed. In doing so, it would be helpful to reflect on the Commission's method of work and evaluate whether it would be appropriate to revise its procedures in order to establish a more efficient work plan. On another level, the relationship of the Commission on Sustainable Development to other agencies in the United Nations system, especially the Conferences of Parties of the various international juridical instruments, should be examined.

28. Secondly, the results of the special session should be geared towards three specific objectives. The first objective should be to endorse the Rio commitments. In many cases, during the four years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, far from evaluating information and proposing action, the Commission on Sustainable Development had concentrated on interpreting or discussing the relevance of the Agenda 21 commitments. Other approaches to the Commission's work should be considered. The second objective was to strengthen the Commission on Sustainable Development. The review to be conducted by the General Assembly in accordance with chapter 38 of Agenda 21 should take into account the efforts to reform and revitalize the United Nations. It would be pointless to limit the evaluation exercise to simple administrative efficiency; in any case, efficiency was essentially measured on the basis of results. The third objective was to adopt a future programme of work. The format which had been used by the Commission on Sustainable Development must be restructured so that the various chapters of Agenda 21 could

be examined without redefining the Agenda itself or establishing a parallel work programme, distinct from the original and far removed from the initially agreed commitments. In any case, the provisions which would require priority attention because their implementation had been delayed or deferred could be identified.

29. Thirdly, with regard to the preparatory process, the time frame established for its completion might be inadequate. Therefore, his delegation proposed that the following series of measures should be taken: the plan for the organization of work suggested by the Secretary-General in his report (A/51/420) should be adopted; the Commission on Sustainable Development should also be requested to examine and distinguish between substantive and institutional aspects during its analysis of the input received in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/113; during the current session the format to be used for reporting the results of the special session should be established. A very short political declaration should be adopted that would reaffirm the principles and commitments of Agenda 21 and renew the collective will to implement them in full. Such a declaration should be accompanied by a programme of work identifying areas where the implementation of the Rio commitments had not produced the expected progress and indicating the necessary corrective measures.

30. Mr. ISLAM (Bangladesh) said that his delegation fully supported the views expressed by Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Concerning the implementation of Agenda 21, some progress had been achieved at the international and national levels, but many difficulties remained to be overcome. Bangladesh had taken Agenda 21 as a basis for planning its sustainable development policy. With the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Government of Bangladesh had formulated a national environment management action plan for the conservation of nature, reduction of environmental degradation, promotion of sustainable development and improvement of the quality of life. The Government, non-governmental organizations, individuals and communities were all participating in the implementation of the plan.

31. The threats to the local environment were varied. Widespread poverty in a densely populated country often made it impractical to take the necessary steps to protect the environment. The people of Bangladesh were fully aware of the need to conserve natural resources. Since large areas of forest had been destroyed over the past 20 years, massive afforestation and reforestation programmes had been undertaken. Specific action for other priority sectors had been recommended, and efforts were being made to implement them. Regrettably, many government initiatives in that area had been thwarted for lack of funds.

32. Bangladesh, which place high priority on forest conservation and the augmentation of forest resources, welcomed the establishment of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which it would provide with recommendations on forest issues. Bangladesh was fully committed to working towards the achievement of the targets set by the Intergovernmental Panel and the implementation of its recommendations.

33. Destruction of forests in the South Asian region had produced an impact on the climate which had also affected Bangladesh. As a consequence of alterations in the flow of water, large tracts of land were becoming arid. The northern part of the country had never before suffered such a persistent drought, which

had led to the inevitable advance of desertification. Aware of the importance of such problems, the international community had adopted the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. Bangladesh, one of the first signatories to the Convention, hoped that the wisdom gained from collective efforts against desertification could be applied successfully in its own land.

34. The environment question could not be viewed in isolation from overall social and economic concerns. Attempts to protect the environment would be futile if proper attention was not paid to achieving development, for example, by eradicating poverty and meeting basic human needs. That fact had been recognized by the international community at the Rio Conference and other major international conferences held since then. Bangladesh urged the international community to step up its efforts to promote global partnership for the implementation of the various recommendations and actions spelled out in Agenda 21, which would provide a blueprint for future sustainable development at the economic, social and environmental levels.

35. Mr. WANG Xuexian (China) said that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and Agenda 21 had ushered in a new era in international development cooperation. The special session of the General Assembly to be held in 1997, for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, was of great importance. It was necessary not only to appraise objectively the progress made in the past few years in international environment and development coordination fell far short of the targets set. To a large extent the commitments made by the developed countries in terms of financial resources and technology transfer had remained a dead letter.

36. There was a growing trend of engaging in covert protectionism under the pretext of environmental considerations. Similarly, developing countries were being made to undertake obligations beyond their actual levels of economic development in such areas as production and consumption patterns and environmental standards. It was only when the international community had a clear understanding of those obstacles to the implementation of Agenda 21 that a focused study could be made on what action to take at the next stage.

37. It was essential to adhere to the principles laid down at the Conference, especially those relating to coordination between environmental protection and economic development, common but differentiated responsibilities, and consideration for the special conditions of developing countries, which were the very essence of the Conference. Those principles, which constituted the basis for international cooperation in the field of environment and development, should also serve as the guiding principles for the review of the implementation of Agenda 21 at the special session.

38. In China's view, that review should be carried out within the broad framework of international development cooperation. For the great majority of developing countries, sustained and healthy economic development and the elimination of the problems deriving from poverty and backwardness were essential preconditions for their effective participation in international cooperation. It was therefore necessary, in connection with the review of the

implementation of Agenda 21, to determine how to create a favourable external environment to enable developing countries to achieve those conditions.

39. Agenda 21 covered a wide range of areas and many issues related to sustainable development. However, the key factor linking those issues was international cooperation, particularly in terms of financial resources and the transfer of technology. The lack of substantive progress on those cross-sector issues was the fundamental cause of the unsatisfactory implementation of Agenda 21. The special session should therefore give priority to those issues and propose feasible solutions.

40. China, as a major developing country, was deeply aware of its responsibilities in improving and protecting the global environment. Environmental protection was one of the priorities of State policy and had therefore been incorporated into the national economic and social development plan and long-term development guidelines. Efforts had also been made to improve laws and regulations in that area. Over the past 18 years, the gross national product had registered an average annual growth rate of about 10 per cent, while efforts to combat any corresponding deterioration of the environment had continued. Over those years, 10 afforestation projects had been implemented for the purpose of protecting and improving the natural environment and achieving a sustainable use of resources. Thousands of polluting factories had been closed. The environmental protection measures which China had implemented would help attain the objective of sustainable development throughout the world.

41. Mr. RONNEBERG (Marshall Islands) said that in 1996 the South Pacific Forum, of which the Marshall Islands was a member, had analysed the question of the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, which would take place at the special session of the General Assembly in 1997. Regional mechanisms had been established to develop concrete proposals within the framework of Agenda 21 and assess the progress made since its adoption. The Forum had asked its Advisory Committee to make preparations to submit reports to the special session. His Government called on the Forum's development partners to support the efforts of the Forum countries and regional organizations so that the review of Agenda 21 would be comprehensive. It cautioned against a proliferation of organizations and meetings, since the efforts of the international community should focus on the adoption of practical measures which would benefit regional initiatives. In view of the limited resources available to the South Pacific Forum countries, it was difficult for them to attend too many meetings dealing with the same topics; unnecessary duplication of efforts must be avoided.

42. The Forum countries, which would report on the various initiatives undertaken since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, recognized the need for a comprehensive approach by the international community to the sustainable management and conservation of all types of forests. The Forum had endorsed a South Pacific code of conduct for logging. Also, since 1997 would be the year of the coral reef in the Pacific, the Forum countries would present reports on the implementation of coastal zone management strategies and other regional projects.

43. His Government was perplexed by the attitudes and policies of some developed countries which, after accepting the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, claimed that action on their part would be too expensive and cumbersome and would not make any difference, and that it would be better if the developing countries shouldered the burden of greenhouse gas reductions, since that would be cheaper. That attitude was a betrayal of trust and cooperation and did not bode well for the future.

44. His delegation remained committed to the protocol proposed by the Alliance of Small Island States, although in the course of negotiations it had become more aware of the diversity of situations in the various countries. In particular, it sympathized with the situation of countries which were currently applying environmentally friendly production techniques, and had been pioneers in the adoption of the "green" policies. If the parties listed in Annex 1 to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change found an equitable formula for burden-sharing among themselves, that would be the best solution, and would enable those parties to accept further deep cuts in emissions. Otherwise, if that formula did not work, an across-the-board cut of emissions by 20 per cent for all the parties listed in Annex 1 could be applied, as proposed in the Alliance of Small Island States protocol. It was unacceptable that some parties to the Convention were maintaining that they would not even attempt to reach the targets set by the Convention. The Geneva Ministerial Declaration had given hope that the process would be revitalized.

45. His delegation undertook to improve its reporting and cooperate closely with the agencies and departments of the United Nations system concerned with issues relating to climate change. It stressed the need for the United Nations system to take into account the special needs of the island States and pay particular attention to the Programme of Action adopted at the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. At the special session on the implementation of Agenda 21, the foundations should be laid for greater cooperation at the international level, the formulation of national and regional initiatives and the mobilization of resources to meet the sustainable development needs of island States. In that respect, his Government expressed deep gratitude to the Government of Japan for establishing the Pacific Islands Centre in Tokyo. The Centre, which would take up issues of trade, tourism and the sustainable development of the Pacific island countries, would promote access to the region by Japanese companies and citizens. Japan should also be recognized for the assistance it was providing to regional climate change efforts in which the Pacific island countries had a special interest.

46. His Government was concerned that the report of the Secretary-General on the special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 (A/51/420) made no mention of the small island developing States. In its view, there should be some reference to the way in which the results of the Global Conference on the sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States could be drawn on at the special session. He requested the secretariat for an explanation on that point. Lastly, he asked the Chairman whether the full text of his statement would be included in the summary record.

47. The CHAIMAN said that Mr. Desai (Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) would speak at the next meeting on the

matters of concern to the Marshall Islands. As for the summary records, he explained that they reflected fully, although in summary form, the contents of the statements made by each speaker.

48. Ms. HORMILLA (Cuba) said that the United Nations Conference on environment and Development had established the link between development and the environment, and underscored the need to deal with the two issues in an integrated way. Nonetheless, since that time the deterioration in the environment, far from being halted, had worsened, mostly owing to unsustainable forms of consumption and production, particularly in the most industrialized countries.

49. Her delegation shared the general view that follow-up activities to the Conference had not fulfilled expectations, since the commitments and agreements adopted had not been backed up with the necessary resources for their implementation. At the special session, delegations should therefore review the progress made regarding the various chapters of Agenda 21, make a partial assessment of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, and identify the measures to be taken in those areas in which the desired progress had not been achieved, instead of holding a debate on "new or broader" aspects of sustainable development as some countries had proposed. As the Secretary-General had pointed out in his report concerning the special session (A/51/420), no attempt should be made to renegotiate Agenda 21 or other intergovernmental agreements on sustainable development.

50. Emphasis should be placed on consideration of chapters 33 and 34 of Agenda 21 in relation to the financial commitments entered into by the developed countries, including contributions under the heading of official development assistance, and in relation to technology transfer questions. The developed countries not only had greater responsibilities in that respect, as a fair contribution to the payment of their ecological debt towards the developing countries; they also had the necessary capability and technology to combat the global effects of environmental and pollution damage.

51. Finally, her delegation welcomed the entry into force of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa.

52. Mr. TCHOULKOV (Russian Federation) said that his country acknowledged the indisputable achievements in the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Firstly, the concept of sustainable development broadly elaborated in Agenda 21 had been further developed at other major United Nations conferences and widely applied in national, regional and international policies. In that connection, the decisions adopted by the Summit on Nuclear Safety and Security, held in Moscow in 1996, were also of particular importance for the promotion of international efforts aimed at the protection of the environment.

53. Activities to promote sustainable development objectives had been clearly structured, and time-frames were being set for the achievement of certain objectives in environmental cooperation. The global market for environmental technologies, goods and services was being actively developed, with wide

participation. Efforts to regulate production, transportation and agriculture in many regions from an ecological point of view had begun to bear fruit. Finally, there had been an increase in collaboration among various actors, including Governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and local communities, in achieving sustainable development objectives. The Commission on Sustainable Development should focus its attention on a small number of priority issues rather than tackling a high number of secondary ones. Clearly, combined efforts were required to solve global problems, but States had different capabilities and their responsibilities could therefore not be identical. The Russian Federation, together with other interested partners, intended to submit a number of ideas at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly with a view to preparing a draft resolution on environment and development.

54. As climate change was a priority issue for the Russian Federation, it was currently finalizing a federal programme for the prevention of dangerous climatic changes and their negative impact. His delegation considered it worthwhile to elaborate a special protocol on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions for the countries with economies in transition, or to reflect the specific interests of that group of countries in the draft protocol currently being negotiated.

55. Although it was necessary to improve the mechanisms of the Convention on Biological Diversity and issues concerning its funding arrangements and the financial rules regulating its Trust Fund remained pending, some positive results had been achieved in that area. The Conference of the Parties, at its second meeting, held in Jakarta in November 1995, had adopted decisions on specific practical areas of cooperation for the years ahead. As a member of the regional group of Central and Eastern European countries, the Russian Federation reaffirmed its intention to protect the specific interests of that group of countries in the framework of the Convention. In accordance with its commitments, the Russian Federation had established a national strategy for the protection and rational use of biological diversity.

56. Another priority issue was the rational use and preservation of a diverse forest genetic stock, which had been widely discussed at the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. A comprehensive and binding international instrument should be prepared, based on the principles adopted by the Conference on Environment and Development for the rational use, preservation and sustainable development of all types of forest. His delegation also welcomed the decision to organize a forum on the biological diversity of forests.

57. Concerning the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, his delegation continued to support the effective measures adopted by the international community in that regard, and intended to participate fully in the implementation of the Convention on the understanding that it would address universal goals in combating desertification on a global scale. Regarding the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly, it was important that organizational and procedural matters should be decided upon during the current session of the Assembly. Generally, the proposals presented by the Bureau of the Commission on Sustainable Development concerning the timetable for drafting and negotiating a final document of the special session had been accepted. At

the same time, experience in the negotiation of such important documents at the United Nations suggested that there should be an additional consultative process, to the extent necessary, especially at the final stage of the preparation of the special session. It clearly would be necessary to establish the proposed special committee of the whole to work on the final document in parallel with plenary debates at a high political level during the special session.

58. Mr. KEBEDE (Ethiopia) expressed full support for the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It was important for the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 to focus attention not only on what had been achieved since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, but also on providing guidelines and political impetus in the field of the environment and sustainable development beyond 1997. The special session should be a platform for the consolidation of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and for streamlining the issues of financing, the transfer of technology and institutional follow-up mechanisms.

59. Swift implementation of the agreed commitments required genuine partnership on several fronts. National Governments had the primary responsibility for promulgating laws and regulations to foster sustainable development and ensuring that they were enforced. Multilateral development agencies and international financial institutions must ensure that sustainable development was achieved without imposing additional burdens on developing countries. Local populations, which endured greater exposure to water pollution and land degradation, must participate actively in all programmes and projects for environmental protection. Big corporations in particular and the private sector in general must play an active role in sustaining environmentally sound development.

60. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General on the special session (A/51/420), its review must go beyond assessment of progress achieved and contribute a frank analyses of the overall progress achieved and the problems encountered at the international, national and local levels. In that connection, the United Nations system and other relevant international organizations must make their contributions to both the preparatory process and the special session itself. Equally important were the contributions of Governments and regional and subregional organizations. Their contributions must be pivotal in elaborating actions that could be transferred from the global to the regional level and in decentralizing responsibilities form the national to the local level.

61. His delegation welcomed the entry into force of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, and stressed the need to set up a special mechanism for the further incorporation of the principles of the Convention into the programmes of the United Nations agencies and multilateral institutions. In that connection, he called for the timely implementation of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/36 on the follow-up to the major international United Nations conferences and summits, including the implementation of their respective programmes of action. He also hailed the steps taken by the Secretary-General to link the implementation of the

Convention to food security, and his plan to integrate the concerns raised in the Convention into the Agenda of the World Food Summit.

62. Seventy-three per cent of Ethiopia's land was affected by drought or desertification. The proportion of land with forest cover had gone down from approximately 40 per cent at the turn of the century to nearly 3 per cent in 1996. It was estimated that over 2 billion cubic metres of soil was washed down annually by torrential rains and rivers, seriously eroding the Ethiopian highland, where most of the population lived. Ethiopia attached paramount importance to international and regional cooperation in the fight against drought and desertification, and called on the international community to help strengthen the East African Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development.

63. Ethiopia had a national disaster prevention strategy, had established a national conservation strategy which integrated environmental issues into the development process, had signed the Convention to Combat Desertification and was elaborating the necessary legal instruments for ratification of the Convention in the near future.

64. Mr. JAYANAMA (Thailand) said that his country attached great importance to international efforts to protect the environment. Thailand had actively participated in global efforts to integrate environment and development in a balanced manner. In that regard, his Government had taken the necessary steps to implement the commitments made during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Some guidelines and recommendations of Agenda 21 had also been incorporated into the national economic and social development plan. Thailand was a member of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and of the Commission on Sustainable Development and had sought support to be the representative of a constituency of the Council of the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

65. At the regional level, Thailand was prepared to enter into cooperation agreements with all countries of the region for the exchange of information, know-how and expertise; the transfer of technology; and capacity-building. At the national level, in its eighth economic and social development plan, it had adopted the principle of sustainable development as its guiding principle. The plan stressed development guidelines in order to ensure more concrete and effective implementation of measures for the conservation and rehabilitation of natural resources and the environment. The Government also stressed the importance of promoting awareness of environmental problems and had launched popular education programmes on environmental issues. In addition, action plans for environmental management in the provinces were prepared annually.

66. The convening of the proposed special session of the General Assembly would be opportune for reviewing the progress achieved at all levels in the five years since the Rio Conference. Thailand agreed with the view expressed by the Secretary-General in his report on the special session (A/51/240) that it should adopt an agreed statement of action-oriented declaration, and that it should have a high political profile. Thailand also agreed that the preparatory process should take into account the views and recommendations of the General Assembly and of the non-governmental organizations, and the outcomes of the third session of the Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development of the

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). It also saw merit in the suggestion to organize a joint meeting of Ministers of Environment and Ministers of Finance as part of the preparatory process for the special session.

67. His delegation believed that the special session should chart the future course of action of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Commission should continue to provide guidance in the formulation of national strategies for sustainable development, the possibility of forging a closer relationship between the Commission and other relevant United Nations bodies and multilateral institutions should be considered with a view to improving the monitoring of the implementation of Agenda 21 and other decisions adopted by the Rio Conference.

68. Lastly, Thailand believed that there should be a linkage between economic growth and environmental protection in order to achieve sustainable development. If the necessary will existed, a way would be found to resolve the problems that arose; however, that required international cooperation, for it was a global problem which countries could not resolve by themselves.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.